1: Kolarz J-4 (no date) 1954 RR1 Siberia RR1

Soviet officials failed to understand that the reindeer plays a vital part in the life of the Northern tribesmen, and that it is not a mere subsidiary to their economy as is the cow of the Russian peasants. According to the tribal customs of the Koryaks and Chukchi it is a sin to sell a living reindeer. The Soviet administrators denounced this custom as sabotage, and imposed on the reindeer-breeders not only compulsory sales, but also the confiscation measures which accompany collectivization. The setting up of collective farms and state farms in the native territories of the Arctic regions of the Soviet Far East, led in the 'thirties' to the unleashing of a violent class struggle which, in turn, resulted in a drastic drop in the number of reindeer. Not only did the rich reindeer breeders engage in large scale 'predatory slaughter' of the animals, but they also hampered the collectivization and nationalization measures in other ways. To escape 'de-kulakization', they split their large herds into smaller ones, and distributed them among their shepherds. Moreover pastureland was wilfully destroyed, apparently on a considerable scale.

Loss of reindeer occurred not only in the private but also in the State-controlled sector. The new State farms which were to introduce higher forms of reindeer breeding were, in reality, far more inefficient than the individual reindeer breeding nomad. In the Far East the State reindeer farms lost one-third of their herds within a single year – a catastrophe which could not be attributed entirely to the infiltration of class-alien elements.

Official Soviet statistics about the development of Soviet Russia's reindeer population demonstrate convincingly what damage the collectivization measures caused. In the first years of the communist régime when state interference with the Far Northern economy was slight there was a clear upward trend. The number of reindeer in the entire Soviet Union increased from 1,765,000 in 1923 to 2,193,000 in 1926–27 and to 2,700,000 in 1931. The year 1931 was the turning point. In 1932 the stock fell to 2,333,000, in 1933 to 2,030,000 and in 1934 it was as low as 1,889,000. These figures which apply to Soviet Russia as a whole do not fully reveal the catastrophic consequences of communist reindeer policy in the Far East. In the Koryak National Area, for instance, where full collectivization had been planned for 1933, the number of reindeer decreased from 264,000 in 1926 to 173,000 in 1932 and 127,000 in 1934.[12]

Soviet statistical evidence about Russia's reindeer population after 1934 is contradictory. Figures produced by various official Soviet sources show a large margin of difference. The *Small Soviet Encyclopedia* says that on January 1st, 1938, the number of reindeer was 1,766,000.[13] This would mean that the situation was then even worse than in 1933. On the other hand, a Soviet standard work on Russian reindeer-breeding published in the post-war period claims that the number of reindeer in 1938 was 28 per cent higher than in 1933. But even this book which

1: Kolarz J-4 (no date) 1954 RR1 Siberia RR1

233 474 gives an optimistic picture of the Russian reindeer situation states that a new period of decline set in during the war owing to the increased slaughter for the army and inferior care of the herds resulting from the mobilization of many native herdsmen.[14] After the war the position improved but whether and when the peak figure of 1931 was reached again, is impossible to say. Such increases in the number of reindeer as there were, were brought about, it seems, by a more liberal application of the collective farm statute. Collective farm members were encouraged to own small reindeer herds privately. The maximum size of these privately owned herds is not known but cases have been mentioned of individual collective farmers having as many as 80, 90, 130, and even up to 200 reindeer each.[15]

233 874 The reindeer problem has caused difficulties to Soviet administrators not only in the purely economic sphere but also in the field of education. What is needed in the Far North is a school which would help to raise hunting and reindeer breeding to a higher level. The more enlightened Russian pedagogues are the first to admit that such a school does not exist. One of the school inspectors posted to Northern Siberia quoted, not without a certain measure of approval, a reindeer breeder who refused for a long time to entrust his two sons to a Soviet boarding school. The father in question said that he taught his children to hunt game, to catch the polar fox and to ride reindeer. In school, he added, they would not learn all this, and when they had finished they would have no practical knowledge. An article in the *Teachers' Gazette* stated that there was a 'grain of truth' in the complaint of the old reindeer breeder. 'The school is indeed too much cut off from practice and thus not able to prepare children for the life in the Far North.'[16] A similar problem, it is true, also exists in other countries. Richard Finnie, in his book *Canada moves North*, says that Eskimo children, after spending years in boarding schools, return to their families unfitted for the lives they must lead.[17]

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

212 871 171 Whatever the quality of school education in the Russian Far North may be, it is a fact that the Soviet authorities have carried out a big cultural revolution in the native territories. The most important part of it has been the liquidation of illiteracy. Until 1931 the Far Northern and Far Eastern peoples could express themselves in writing only in the form of drawings or through the medium of the Russian language. In May, 1931, they received an alphabet of their own, the 'Unified Northern Alphabet' as it was called. It was officially approved by the Ministry of Education of the R.S.F.S.R. The 'Unified Northern Alphabet' was a Latin alphabet and the decision to adopt it was not taken without a long struggle fought out behind the scenes between the supporters of latiniza-